

# Evaluation needs to be evaluated

Students must be encouraged to research, and mentored and monitored as they do so

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The role of evaluation in higher education has always been hotly contested and debated by the academia. It is unfortunate that our systems of academic evaluation have not been updated with the times. The fundamental structure of evaluation remains more or less the same as it was under British rule. Despite India being home to some excellent universities, holistic and well-rounded techniques of academic evaluation are still lacking. Whatever is enforced in our colleges and universities is just a confused, modern mishmash of what the colonizers had put in place.

The manner in which the zeitgeist of a discipline is suffocated in our classrooms and examinations is distressing. Our colleges and universities conduct final examinations at the conclusion of every session which is usually a written paper of three-hour duration, the sole objective of which is to size up a student's potential in the subject concerned. The examination is a condensed questionnaire of the discipline in which the learner is expected to translate her understanding of the discipline into a few questions which round up and set a score on her intelligence. Unfortunately, the learner's understanding and its practical applicability, extra readings, curiosity and hundreds of unanswered questions related to the discipline fall outside the purview of the academic syllabus and are buried with the end of the official syllabus taught in the classroom.

It is psychologically proven that we shrink and cringe when under external pressure. On the other hand, it is also psychologically established that the best learning happens in freedom when the mind is under no obligation to perform. It is therefore not surprising in the least that children remember almost everything about the cartoon characters they read or the movies they watch, without ever straining their minds to do so. However, they have to repeatedly stuff their subjects into their minds, as a result of which their love for the subject and their curiosity about the discipline transforms into a revulsion which they have to drink up as a bitter concoction only to ensure their professional survival.

Learning flowers in freedom when evaluation is not reduced to a nightmarish experience. Instead of the usual end-of-session examination, our classrooms should become centres of free learning. Daily progress should be monitored by the teachers, in ways that are learner-friendly instead of marks-centric.

A close and careful observation of the students and an extended teacher-student in-

teraction can ensure that every student is given her own time and pace to flower and learn the subject. There should be various research-based activities held throughout the year which focus on each student's research potential. Regular workshops should be conducted where learners, instead of the professors, deliver presentations. When they are encouraged to conduct their own research on an everyday basis, they will feel responsible for their own learning. The final examination should be one of the many criteria upon which the students are assessed, not the only one. If learners are assessed on the basis of their everyday activities and research, true learning will blossom.

A student's relationship with discipline is a psychological dimension of infinite potential. What each student might uncover, develop, research or innovate in a discipline can never be assessed by a few questions. This psychological relationship ought to be discovered over the entire session under the guidance of able mentors. Instead of confining the scope of research to academic degrees, it should become an integral part of a student's everyday learning. Learners should be assessed on the basis of their potential to create, research and uncover rather than their capacity to memorize facts and data. A learning environment needs to be created where the final examination is not a judgement day for the students.

The best learning experiences and the most breakthrough researches in the world happen under freedom and not under drudgery. Evaluation need not always be a painful grind. It can very well happen under the attentive observation of mentors and in classrooms where there are no barriers to the manner and pace of learning. Every learner learns at her own pace and in her own manner, which must be respected. Standardized and automated evaluation squeezes each student within the stifling frames of fossilized, theoretical learning, which only does more harm than good.

It is, of course, not a simple task to wish away all our antiquarian models of evaluation and it might take years before we manage to implement a continuous system of evaluation and monitoring, but we can make a start. If every teacher begins to devote a few classes where learners are encouraged to conduct research allied to their discipline, it will definitely loosen the academia's marks-obsession. It is with steps like these that maybe one day, our students can learn in an environment where there is no fear, and the head is held high. Till then, it can rightly be said that our academic evaluation techniques are successful in killing the discipline being taught and the learners' love for the same.

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